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June 10, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue Northwest
Washington, D.C., 20402

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

I write to you today to urge you to adopt pooled sampling, the latest innovation in COVID-19 testing, throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). As you may know, pooled sampling is when large numbers of test samples – anywhere from 10 to 100 specimens at once – are pooled together and then screened at once. If you get a positive result from a pool, then you test each person in the sample. As we continue to see the number of positive cases nationally hover at just 1-6% of those tested, pooled sampling can make a huge impact to help us identify those veterans and VA staff infected and isolate them while being able to reassure those who are negative that they do not have the virus. As positive test results continue to decrease, this will become even more helpful. For example, on Saturday June 6th, New York tested 60,435 people for COVID-19 but only 781 were positive — just over 1% of the total. This means many pools of samples will not need to have further testing.

Experts note that these can be very accurate and efficient. As former Food and Drug Administrator Scott Gottlieb recently noted, pooled sampling is how China claims it recently managed to screen 10 million citizens in Wuhan in 19 days. As the *New York Times* recently reported, this has led to a huge surge in Wuhan's testing capacity: "Laboratories went from processing around 46,000 tests a day, on average, before the drive, to as many as 1.47 million tests on Friday. By comparison, the state of New York has tested 1.7 million people since March 4."

Pooled sampling can be a game changer to get large numbers of people tested quickly at the VA. This will be especially helpful at VA nursing homes. I look forward to working with you to bring pooled sampling to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Thank you and I appreciate your prompt attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Max Rose
Member of Congress